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## The Scottish covenanters and the drive for a godly society 1639-1651

JOHN R. YOUNG\*

An important feature of post-Reformation Europe was the drive for a 'godly state' and a 'godly society'. The Covenanting movement took over the apparatus of power in Scotland in its struggle with Charles I as King of Scotland. The movement had emerged by 1637-38 and the failure of Charles I to defeat the Covenanters in the Bishops' Wars of 1639-40 resulted in the Covenanters taking political control of Scotland. A constitutional settlement was enacted between 1639 and 1641. This settlement reduced the powers of Charles I as King of Scotland, but it also enhanced the powers of the Scottish Parliament (Young 1996). Furthermore, the Church of Scotland was now presbyterian in nature, following the abolition of episcopacy as a fundamental component of the Covenanting revolution. The structure of the Church had been a contentious issue since the Reformation of 1560 and the rule of the Covenanters in many ways constituted a second Scottish Reformation (Young 2006). Andrew Melville's *Second Book of Discipline* of 1578 set out this presbyterian structure for the government of the Church by kirk sessions, presbyteries, synods and ultimately the General Assembly. The *First Book of Discipline* of 1560 set out an earlier reformed manifesto and dealt with important issues such as poor relief and education for example. The *Second Book of Discipline* emphasised the distinction between the 'church' and the 'state'. These were to be separate spheres of influence and the state should not interfere in Church affairs (Cameron 1972; Kirk 1980). During the period of Covenanting rule, 1639-51, the ruling body for the affairs of the Church of Scotland was the General Assembly. These assemblies met annually and they liaised with the state via the standing executive committee known as the Commission of the Kirk. This sat between annual General Assemblies and looked after Church affairs. It

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lobbied the Scottish Parliament for the enactment of legislation for a godly society, in addition to lobbying for specific ecclesiastical legislation (Young 2006).

The historiography of the Reformation in Europe has noted the importance of a behavioural reformation or a reformation of manners. In terms of discipline, John Knox, the most important founding father of the Scottish Reformation, was highly influenced by *John Calvin's Ecclesiastical Ordinances* (1541) and his own personal experience of Calvin's Geneva as a model for reformed discipline in post-Reformation Scotland. The parish unit was at the heart of the Church's attention in the post-Reformation period and the moral behaviour of parishioners was to be scrutinised and regulated at the local level by kirk sessions. Local ministers and lay elders played an important role in dealing with transgressions and 'offences'. Furthermore, in the post-Reformation period there was an increased association between sin and crime. Some important examples of this are adultery (1563), fornication (1567), Sabbath-breaking (1579) and drunkenness (1617). Within a wider European context, kirk sessions were largely modelled on the consistory in Calvin's Geneva and they were similar to the reformed consistories of the United Provinces of the Dutch Republic, for example (Mason 1998; MacCulloch 2003; Young 2006).

The works of Michael Graham and most recently Margo Todd have greatly added to the historiography of the Reformation in Scotland by detailed examination of kirk session and presbytery records concerning the drive for a godly society. Graham's work covered the period between 1560 and 1610, whereas Margo Todd extended her study from 1560 to 1640 (Graham 1996; Todd 2002). Both are important pieces of work based on exhaustive research. Given that the period of Covenanting rule did in many respects constitute a second Scottish Reformation, however, there is a substantial historiographical gap that needs to be filled in the extension of Graham and Todd's work. The General Assembly lobbied on a regular basis for a godly society and the Covenanting parliaments did legislate for this. (Young 2006). This could be regarded as part of a 'high' political-religious culture on the part of the Covenanters. With regard to 'low culture', or a history 'from below', the actual enforcement of this legislation was largely in the hands of the Church. Kirk session records in particular, but also presbytery records (co-ordinating the work of kirk sessions within its jurisdiction) are remarkable historical sources, not only for looking at the punishment of ungodly or deviant behaviour and offences, but also for Scottish social history of the early modern period in general. These records have remained largely untapped for the Covenanting period. Examination of kirk session and presbytery records opens up another world for the historian. The lives, behaviour and punishment of 'ordinary' people outside the Covenanting elites, such as diplomats, army commanders and parliamentarians, for example, can be scrutinised. This paper therefore looks at examples of such activities. Evidence and examples are drawn from the north-east of Scotland with the records of the kirk session of Elgin and the

kirk session of Old Machar parish presbytery of Lanark.

Evidence from the historical punishment of offences indicated by kirk sessions were of a sexual nature, then adultery. Other common offences were Sabbath breaking (such as the selling and consumption of alcohol) and punishment could be imposed by fining, with fines being used to encourage repentance in a parish church in the vicinity of the pulpit. Penitents stood at church service according to the number of times they had to repent before the congregation as the pillar, place or seat. It was a raised platform. By the seven lesser 'offenders' (such as drunkenness) repeat offences (such as adultery) could be ordered to sit on the stool for a single offence. This often occurred and offenders were often sent to the stool. This was dependent on the severity of the offence. On a single Sunday to a whole year. Offenders could be sent to the stool, individual could also be made to sit on the stool but Sunday on the stool was a public humiliation for neighbours and community where sermons were often given and time for someone to be on the stool was possible for less serious offences. Offences could take the form of offenders kneeling and repenting for their offence. The congregation and sitting for penitents. This was a symbolic humiliation process for the community. For different types of offences, more serious offences, where public humiliation could be imposed and exposure of parts of the body bareheaded (Todd, 2002, p.

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kirk session of Old Machar parish in Aberdeen. Other examples are drawn from the  
presbytery of Lanark.

Evidence from the historiography of the post-Reformation period and the  
punishment of offences indicates that the most common form of offences dealt with  
by kirk sessions were of a sexual nature. These were primarily to do with fornication  
then adultery. Other common offences included swearing, drunkenness, blasphemy,  
and Sabbath breaking (such as working on the Sabbath, travelling on the Sabbath,  
the selling and consumption of alcohol, sporting activities etc). Different forms of  
punishment could be imposed by kirk sessions and presbyteries. These included  
fining, with fines being used to help support the local deserving poor. The stool of  
repentance in a parish church was used. The stool of repentance was situated in  
the vicinity of the pulpit. Penitents were required to sit there for the period of the  
church service according to their 'humiliation'. After the sermon penitents would  
repent before the congregation. The stool of repentance was also often referred to  
as the pillar, place or seat. It was placed in front of the congregation, often on a  
raised platform. By the seventeenth century some churches had a 'low stool' for  
lesser 'offenders' (such as drunks) and a 'high stool' either for more serious or  
repeat offences (such as adultery and fornication). Where the offences were known  
of in more than one parish in a town or in several communities, then the penitent  
could be ordered to sit on the stool of repentance in more than one church for a  
single offence. This often occurred with sinners in an urban environment. Crucially,  
offenders were often sent to the stool of repentance for different periods of time.  
This was dependent on the seriousness of their offences. This could range from a  
single Sunday to a whole year of Sundays. On the final Sunday of the period of being  
sent to the stool, individual confessions were then given by the penitents. Offenders  
could also be made to sit on the stool during weekdays when sermons took place,  
but Sunday on the stool was a far more serious affair as more of the offenders'  
neighbours and community would be present. The Saturday prior to communion  
where sermons were often given on the effects of sin was also a particularly serious  
time for someone to be on the stool of repentance. Private penitence was sometimes  
possible for less serious offences, first-time offenders and younger people. This could  
take the form of offenders kneeling before the elders at the kirk session meeting and  
repenting for their offence. This avoided public appearance and humiliation before  
the congregation and sitting on the stool. The sackcloth was another device used  
for penitents. This was a symbolic article of clothing worn by sinners as part of the  
humiliation process for the confessing of sins. Different types of material were used  
for different types of offences. Coarser linen, for example, was used in sackcloths for  
more serious offences, whereas linen was often used for lesser offences. The process  
of humiliation could be intensified and emphasised by different forms of nakedness  
and exposure of parts of the body. This included being barelegged, barefooted and  
bareheaded (Todd, 2002, p. 127-182).



Imprisonment for a period of time was also used for those whose genuine penitence was doubted or had not turned up for their initial summons. This was known as being warded and was designed to bring such people to an awareness of their sinfulness. Warding could take place in church vaults, steeples, vestries or the local town tollbooth. This was designed as shock tactic to encourage genuine repentance prior to being sent to the stool of repentance. The 'branks' and the 'jougs' were used for more serious offenders. The 'branks' was an iron cage that was locked around a person's head with a forked insertion put into the mouth. The 'jougs' was an iron neck collar. This was chained to the kirkyard wall near the entrance gate to the church. It was also sometimes chained to the church wall. Both punishments represented another means by which the sinner could be publicly displayed as being ungodly and separated from the rest of the godly community (Todd, 2002, p. 140-149).

Fornication and adultery cases featured prominently in church records. A student named William Gordon appeared before Old Machar kirk session on 22 May 1648. He confessed his 'whoredome' with Janet Fyte and showed himself to be very penitent. The session took this penance to heart and feared that 'the youth would be too sore dejactit [dejected]'. His punishment was to consist of a fine of 5 merks (one merk was valued at two-thirds of the Scottish pound. £12 Scots were equivalent to £1 sterling) and he was also to sit on the stool of repentance for a whole day. Thereafter he was to be absolved. Yet it would appear that Gordon may well have fallen back into his former ways. On 11 March 1649 the case of one Alexander Gordon was dealt with. Gordon humbly desired to show the session that he was very penitent for his sin. Gordon desired to show that he had highly offended God and that he had shown an evil example to the parish due to 'his relaps in whoredome'. He asked that the session take his case to heart and let him be absolved the next day. The session, after consideration, granted him absolution as long as he showed penance on the next Sunday. Alexander Gordon may have been the same person as William Gordon. Both are described in the session records as a son of Thomas Gordon of Kethocksmill and the entry for 11 March describes a relapse into whoredom. An alternative explanation is that they were two different sons of Thomas Gordon and both had been involved in this kind of activity (Munro 1909, p. 29, 31).

Isobel Robertson confessed living in adultery with John Bain at the Old Machar kirk session meeting of 22 October 1648. She was ordered to appear at the kirk door the next day bare footed and bare-legged in the sackcloth with branks in her mouth. In addition, she was also to go to the stool of repentance. Lanark presbytery dealt with adultery involving Thomas Stothart and Nans Ballanden. They appeared before the presbytery on 26 May 1642 and they confessed 'their incestuous adulterie in sackcloathe'. They were ordered to return to their parish kirk session and obey their kirk session's punishment. They were to stand at the church door barefoot and bare-legged, then at the public place of repentance. Thereafter they were to go

to all the churches in Lanark. One Marjory Laing was banished described as an adulterer, this 1909, p. 30; Robertson 1839, p.

The sanctity of the Sabbath in Scotland. Sabbath breaking was legislated against this. Sabbath and work-related activities were (2006). Some examples are provided before Elgin kirk session for George Foster appeared before Elgin kirk session. She thought that this was 'a w' the pulpit on the following Sunday. Here an example to others. Put Keir by Elgin kirk session. C spreading muck on Sunday evening before Old Machar kirk session. Machar for droving sheep from the order to repent before the pulpit (253; Munro 1909, p.46).

Alcohol abuse on the Sabbath session records for 11 April Patrick Moir and George Gordon congregation before the pulpit themselves upon their knees to the offence in prophaning of the to their repentance. On 12 October of 20 shillings and to make his the church. Johnstone had paid week on 5 October. At this meeting due to drunkenness but rather that he had been drinking it was also ordered to be summar punishment for her at the meeting the session noted its previous place in tavern houses within were set at 40 shillings to the the purchaser was the master seller. Therefore the head of for a purchaser.

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to all the churches in Lanark presbytery where they were to 'satisfie in lyk maner'.  
One Marjory Laing was banished from Elgin parish on 19 October 1647. She was  
described as an adulterer, thief, scolder, Sabbath breaker and blasphemer (Munro  
1909, p. 30; Robertson 1839, p. 29; Ree 1908, p. 258).

The sanctity of the Sabbath was an important aspect of life in post-Reformation  
Scotland. Sabbath breaking was seriously frowned upon and both church and state  
legislated against this. Sabbath breaking encompassed a variety of activities. Work  
and work-related activities were common features of Sabbath breaking (Young  
2006). Some examples are provided. On 26 February 1641 William Duncan appeared  
before Elgin kirk session for grinding corn on the Sabbath. On 4 June 1644 Christine  
Foster appeared before Elgin kirk session for putting out plaid to dry on the Sabbath.  
She thought that this was 'a work of necessitie', but she was ordered to stand before  
the pulpit on the following Sunday and publicly confess her fault. This was to make  
her an example to others. Public admonishment was to be served on one Thomas  
Keir by Elgin kirk session. On 31 May 1646 the session noted that he had been  
spreading muck on Sunday evenings. Alexander Duncan of Skene parish appeared  
before Old Machar kirk session on 6 November 1650. He was summoned to Old  
Machar for droving sheep from that parish to Skene on the Sabbath. Duncan was  
ordered to repent before the pulpit on the following Sunday (Ree 1908, p. 238, 249,  
253; Munro 1909, p.46).

Alcohol abuse on the Sabbath was also a common problem. Old Machar kirk  
session records for 11 April 1641 indicate that Thomas Oram, William Watson,  
Patrick Moir and George Gordon, all of Old Aberdeen, appeared before the whole  
congregation before the pulpit immediately after the sermon. They 'humbled  
themselves upon there knees and asked God and the congregatiōne forgiueness for  
the offence in prophaning of the Lords day be drinking'. They were then absolved due  
to their repentance. On 12 October 1645, John Johnstone was ordered to pay a fine  
of 20 shillings and to make his repentance on the stool of repentance for vomiting in  
the church. Johnstone had personally appeared before the kirk session the previous  
week on 5 October. At this meeting Johnstone stated that his sickness had not been  
due to drunkenness but rather the 'payne of the wondie grawell'. It appears, however,  
that he had been drinking in the house of Alexander Sandeson. Sandeson's wife  
was also ordered to be summoned for censure, although there is no record of any  
punishment for her at the meeting of 12 October. Several weeks later on 2 November  
the session noted its previous consent of 19 October that no drinking should take  
place in tavern houses within the parish at any time on the Sabbath. Fining levels  
were set at 40 shillings to the seller of alcohol and 20 shillings for the purchaser. If  
the purchaser was the master of a family, then he was to pay the same amount of the  
seller. Therefore the head of the family would be subject to double the normal fine  
for a purchaser.

Alcohol abuse on the Sabbath was still an issue in Old Machar parish in January 1646. John Cuttes, son of one Andrew Cuttes, appeared before the kirk session on 16 January and was accused of drinking on the Sabbath before the sermon. Cuttes stated that he went in with 'sume wark' to James Law and his wife and drank some ale. As this was his first offence he was fined 13 shillings to 'mack his repentance in publict', but if the offence should be repeated then he would face a new punishment. The session then proceeded to consider the case of one William Touche in Old Aberdeen. Touche was accused not only of drinking before the sermon, but also of 'preisuing to tack ane kis frome ane married woman'. He was convicted of this offence and ordered to pay 26 shillings and 8 pence. As he was 'ane poor printis boy' (a poor apprentice boy), however, the exacting of this money was continued until he gave proof of his behaviour in the future and it was not thought necessary to bring him in public. The third case dealt with was that of Elspeth Mitchell. It becomes apparent that the cases of Cuttes, Touche and Mitchell were all related to each other. Elspeth Mitchell was the wife of James Law (mentioned in the case of John Cuttes). She was accused of selling drink to the 'two boyes' (namely John Cuttes and William Touche), but she defended herself by saying that she had only given them a pint of ale to them and her husband's own apprentices. She promised in front of the church that she would never again do this. Her case was dismissed after she had been fined 20 shillings (Munro 1909, p. 15, 20-21).

The Old Machar cases of 16 January 1646 highlight several areas of social deviance or non-compliance that the kirk session sought to redress. First, there is the economic relationship of the master (James Law) and the young apprentices (John Cuttes and William Touche). Second, there is the relationship between the master's wife (Elspeth Mitchell) and the young apprentices. Third, the element of alcohol entered the equation. Having consumed some alcohol, the young apprentice William Touche, attempted to kiss the master's wife, his sexual desire perhaps fuelled by his alcoholic consumption. Elspeth Mitchell was not perceived by the kirk session to have been a potential adulteress or seductress. All these issues should be viewed within the context of Sabbath breaking and the consumption of alcohol on a Sunday. In terms of the kirk session attempting to regulate the selling and consumption of alcohol, on 23 December 1649 the session ordered that taverns in the town and parish were not to sell drink to people until they became drunk either on the Sabbath or any week day. Church censures would be applied to those who did (Munro 1909, p. 38).

Lanark presbytery also dealt with cases of alcohol abuse. On 5 September 1644, for example, the presbytery noted that 'drunkenesse and blasphemie ar sinnes verie commone'. They were especially responsible for provoking God's wrath against the country. Therefore each minister in the presbytery was ordered to censure 'exemplarie persons guiltie' in their several parishes. On 27 March 1645 Lanark presbytery noted the 'frequent relapse of the common multitude into grosse profanations'. More precise notice was to be taken of 'all grosse and scandalous outbrekings', such as

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drunkenness, blasphemies, Sabbath breakings, etc. Those found guilty were to be 'exemplarie punished' by their names being read out of the pulpit and by putting them in the sackcloth at the church door at the time of the church service. This was to take place at the first Sunday after the conviction. Furthermore, 'for better observing the Lord's day', the presbytery banned drinking in ale houses after church services in order that everyone could return home to their families. Contraveners of these instructions were to be censured as Sabbath breakers and all parents and masters of families were to be answerable for their children and servants. On 1 May 1645 one John Tweeddale from Lesmahgow appeared before Lanark presbytery. He acknowledged his fault in excessive nightly drinking, especially on the Sabbath. He had also been disobedient to his local kirk session in not appearing. This he excused on his inability to travel due to illness and he offered to be obedient to the session under the censure of £40.

Sustained alcohol abuse resulted in the excommunication of three men by Lanark presbytery on 10 January 1650. James Thomson, John Jamie and Archibald MacQuarrie were found to be 'so farre from giving signes of repentance for their sinne', despite previous actions and interventions on the part of the presbytery. James Thomson was 'found diverse times drunke' and John Jamie was 'found to continue in his impietie, neglect of duetie to his wife and mother, in continuall drinking'. The same applied to Archibald MacQuarrie who continued 'in his sinne of drunkennesse, whereby he hath undone his state and familie'. At an earlier presbytery meeting on 3 May 1649 MacQuarrie was described as a soldier and he had killed another soldier 3 to 4 years previously in Glasgow. Alcohol abuse on the part of both John Jamie and Archibald MacQuarrie had therefore resulted in the breakdown of the family unit and the neglect of their wives and mothers (Robertson 1839, p. 36-37, 40-41, 70, 76-77).

Elgin kirk session dealt with Girsall Arthur, Agnes Smyth, Jean Stewart and Janet Cuming on 29 December 1640. These women had been drinking and dancing on a Sunday evening. They were ordered to be put in the 'jogis', two at a time at separate times (Saturday 9-10 for two of them, and 10-11 for the other two. It was not specifically stated if this was to be morning or evening). On 31 May 1646 the session dealt with John Bankes, for being drunk on the Sabbath and for 'dinging' of Jean Panton, who was also drunk. They were ordered to stand at the pillar in their own clothes where they were to be publicly admonished. If they ever behaved like this again then they were to stand in the joughs for two days and at the time of preaching they were to stand at the pillar foot in 'hair cloath' (sackcloth) with a paper on their head (Ree 1908, p. 237-238, 253).

Kirk sessions were important in local communities for the regulation of popular culture. 'Pennie bridals' in particular were targeted as focal points of communal feasting, singing, dancing, drinking and celebration. Each guest paid a penny to take part in the celebrations. Penny bridals were extremely popular and could attract

large numbers of people for a communal party. Such activities were frowned upon by the Church of Scotland (Todd 2002, p. 274-275). The 1645 General Assembly, for example, passed an act for restraining abuses at penny bridals. The act noted 'the great profanitie and severall abuses' that usually took place at penny bridals. Penny bridals proved to be 'fruitful seminaries of all lasciviousnesse and debaushtrie' (lavishness and debauchery) that attracted an 'excessive number of people thereto'. The General Assembly therefore regarded such activities as a great dishonour to God, the scandal of their Christian profession and prejudicial to the welfare of the country. Therefore presbyteries were required to 'take such speciall care for restraining these abuses' (*Acts of the General Assembly*, 1843, p.129). On 26 May 1642, for example, Lanark presbytery noted a 'tumultuous' bridal and 'promiscuous dancing' at Carstares. John Lithgow, deemed to be the 'author of the said tumult', was ordered to appear before the kirk session of Carstares (Robertson 1839, p.29).

The regulation of popular culture could also extend into the area of Sabbath breaking. William Watt, a piper, appeared before Old Machar kirk session on 30 January 1648. He was accused of playing the pipes on the Sabbath. He told the session that he had been in the house of one William Smith. A soldier name John Henderson had some children with him and he asked that Watt play a tune. The session thought it very unfit for him to carry his pipes on the Sabbath and he was therefore ordered to repent before the pulpit. On 24 February 1650 Elgin kirk session noted that Thomas Grant's son and five other boys had all been 'sporting in tyme of preaching'. All six boys were to be belted for this. The curtailing of sporting activities on the Sabbath was a prominent feature of church action in the wider seventeenth century. On 17 December 1626, for example, Old Machar kirk session noted that William Milne had been playing bowls on the Sabbath on a regular basis. Later on 7 November 1680, the session noted that some servant men and boys belonging to one William Gray and others had been playing golf near the Bridge of Don during the time of the afternoon sermon. (Munro 1909, p.5, 28, 73; Ree 1908, p. 270; Todd 2002, p. 183-226).

Individual behaviour and godliness within the church at times of worship was regulated. Such regulation encompassed a range of different human behaviour and activities. On 17 October 1641, for example, Old Machar kirk session decided on fining levels for those who brought their dogs to church. A fine of 6 shillings 8 pence was imposed. On 14 May 1643 the session issued instructions for preventing people from going up to the bells of the church steeple on the Sabbath (the curtailing of this activity was therefore not just restricted to the time of church service). John and Harry Kilgour were instructed to stop this happening. On 16 September 1649 it was intimated from the pulpit that all parents and masters were to ensure that their children and apprentices behaved 'soberlie and reverentlie in the church'. This was due to the activities of some 'disorderlie boyes'. Parents and masters were therefore to be responsible for their children and apprentices and they would be censured if the

children and apprentices did not also mentioned on 16 December summoned for 'perturbing the Trupe. In addition, she was sur her parents. She was ordered t and thereafter 'humble himselff subject to censure on 14 July 1 amend their ways would be su with it' when they were waker other unseemly behaviour wa: 15 October 1641. George Marti were later cited by the session Laing and Dunbar were ordere heades' and then to the pillar 1 at the pillar foot. Thus, Laing than the two others during ch to church behaviour can be fo Elgin. One John Peterkin appe on Mr. James Strachane, scho divine service'. Therefore John schoolteacher, during the chu case was referred due to a lack printed records (Munro 1909,

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the church at times of worship was of different human behaviour and the Machar kirk session decided on church. A fine of 6 shillings 8 pence and instructions for preventing people from being on the Sabbath (the curtailment of the time of church service). John Napier's death was an unfortunate happening. On 16 September 1649 it was decided that the parents and masters were to ensure that their children were 'reverentlie in the church'. This was a significant step. The Parents and masters were therefore responsible and they would be censured if the

children and apprentices did not behave. Inappropriate behaviour in the church was also mentioned on 16 December 1649. Jean Kilgour, daughter of Harry Kilgour, was summoned for 'perturbing the worships'. She had pulled a seat from under Margaret Trupe. In addition, she was summoned for cursing, baying and being disobedient to her parents. She was ordered to repent 'on the public place' during church service and thereafter 'humble herself before the pulpit'. Sleeping in the church was also subject to censure on 14 July 1650. Those who had a habit of sleeping and did not amend their ways would be subject to censure, as would those who thought 'evell with it' when they were wakened by their neighbours. Laughing in church or any other unseemly behaviour was to be censured, according to Elgin kirk session of 15 October 1641. George Martin, Alexander Laing, Isobel Hardie and Isobel Dunbar were later cited by the session on 4 July 1647 for laughing in church. On 6 July Laing and Dunbar were ordered to stand at the church door with 'the myter on their heades' and then to the pillar foot. Martin and Hardie were ordered to appear only at the pillar foot. Thus, Laing and Dunbar must surely have been laughing more than the two others during church service. Probably the most bizarre case relating to church behaviour can be found in the entry of 8 May 1640 for the kirk session of Elgin. One John Peterkin appeared before the session 'for letting down some urine on Mr. James Strachane, schoolmaster, out of the wast laft of the kirk in tyme of divine service'. Therefore John Peterkin had urinated over James Strachan, the local schoolteacher, during the church service. Peterkin had been in the church loft. The case was referred due to a lack of elders at the meeting, but it does not reappear in the printed records (Munro 1909, pp. 17, 18, 36, 44; Ree, 1908, pp. 236, 240, 257).

Church records are important sources for the study of witch-hunting in early modern Scotland. Scotland was one of the main areas of the European witch-hunt and there were five large-scale hunts in Scotland between c.1590 and 1662. Witch hunting took place in Scotland during the period of Covenanting rule and there was a large-scale hunt in 1649-50. Kirk sessions were important as being the first institutional port of call where accusations were raised and heard. In this respect, therefore, they constitute important historical records for the study of witch-hunting within local communities, as well as providing evidence between the 'periphery' and the 'centre' in Edinburgh where church and state legislation was enacted at the national level. Presbyteries co-ordinated the kirk sessions' witch-hunting activities. An example of this can be taken from the presbytery of Lanark. A woman named Janet Cowts, a 'confessing' witch imprisoned in Peebles, had accused eleven women of witchcraft (thereby 'exposing' the coven) in the parish of Crawford-Douglas. They were then transported to Lanark where they were interrogated and tortured in Lanark Tolbooth on 30 November 1649. The moderator of the presbytery, Mr Robert Birnie, had sent for George Cathie, the infamous witch-pricker, to seek out the mark of the devil (this was a common feature of witch-hunting in Scotland). Cathie 'did prik pinnes in everie one of them'. The moderator of the presbytery was present during



these events, as were local bailies and Gideon Jack, the parliamentary commissioner for Lanark burgh in 1649. Gideon Jack was a member of the 1649 Committee of Estates, an interval committee of the Scottish Parliament that played an important role in the 1649 witch-hunt by issuing formal commissions for trying witchcraft. The presbytery continued to deal with the Cowts' case for the remainder of 1649 and into 1650. Janet Cowts had probably been executed as a 'witch' by 18 April 1650 (Young 2006; Robertson 1839, p. 75-76, 77-82; Levack 1992, p. 194).

The Covenanting movement in Scotland attempted to create a godly society. This can be viewed as an attempt to secure a second Scottish Reformation. Scotland can also be viewed as an important case study for the drive for a godly state and society in a post-Reformation context. From the perspective of a 'high culture and low culture in Scotland' theme, the experiences of ordinary people at a local level at the hands of a Covenanting elite can be extracted from kirk session and presbytery records. A future research agenda for the 1640s could therefore expand on the work of Michael Graham and Margo Todd by expanding their studies of these records into the period of the Covenanting administration of Scotland. Such an agenda would make a substantial contribution to our understanding of Scottish society under the Covenanters during the period of the British Civil Wars, 1637-1651.

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